

Who is in your learning network? Who do you learn from on a regular basis? Who do you turn to for your own professional development?

While ONEplace can play an integral role in your professional development, each of us needs to build our own dynamic learning network. Fortunately, the online connections available to all of us make this less of a challenge. Indeed, the greatest challenge may be the overwhelming amount of available information and connections. For this reason, some initial guidelines are in order:

First, **your network is for you**. Don't follow someone on Twitter because other people do or don't give in to the temptation to grade yourself by the number of connections or comments or likes on Facebook or LinkedIn. This is your learning network, so make sure it is serving your learning needs.

Second, **your needs change so let your network change, too**. Follow a thought leader's posts and blogs as long as they are helpful. Some writers keep rehashing their insights, so after a few weeks, you know their perspective and can move on. Sometimes, you may wish to simply get new voices into your learning mix, so shake up your roster. The point is to freely adjust the mix to meet your changing needs.

Third, **keep your network manageable**. There is only so much that any one person can digest, so keep the number of blogs, tweets, groups, etc. within reason. Make sure the ones you follow give you the highest quality information, best connections, and most insightful conversations.

### ***Learning to network...Networking to learn***

**1. Connect** – The growth engine of your learning network is your willingness to reach out and make connections with new people. Leave a comment on a blog post or podcast, reply to a question. Merely reading, listening, or watching is not connecting. The more people you connect with online, the more you can take advantage of the strength of weak ties.

**2. Contribute** – If you have something to share, post it online where it may be accessible and useful to others. Your insights (and even your struggles) are valuable to others who don't have your experience. Contributing is a way to offer something of value to the new people with whom you are connecting.

**3. Converse** – Over time the connections and contributions you make online will evolve into conversations as others respond to you as well. These conversations will grow into relationships and possible collaborations.

**4. Request** – If you've made connections, offered contributions, and cultivated relationships over time... then when you make requests, they are more likely to fall on fertile soil. You'll find that you'll receive much higher quality answers and support by asking your network than you will by searching online.

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## ***Networking Tools and Anecdotes***

**5. Blog** – Blogs continue to be a powerful way to connect and learn. Putting your thoughts and insights into coherent sentences solidifies your learning and creates a resource for sharing. If you read many blogs, an RSS aggregator can be a helpful tool.

**6. Tweet** – Twitter is the most popular social microblogging tool. The posts are short and easy to skim, and because following someone on Twitter is not a reciprocal relationship (unlike Facebook), it is easy to create a custom group of people to follow – and to manage the flow of incoming information.

**7. Use LinkedIn Groups** – LinkedIn Groups provide a targeted set of connections for sharing content, finding answers, engaging dialogue, and making contacts. The more targeted the group, the higher value the conversation.

## ***Final Thoughts***

**8. Be Patient** – Building a personal learning network doesn't happen quickly, and it isn't a trivial commitment. It takes time and perseverance to make connections and build relationships. But it is well worth the investment to one day have a 24/7 global network to tap into whenever you're in need – or simply want to learn something new.

**9. Be Authentic** – It is more important to be authentic in your online connections than to grow your connections or increase your likes. The more you reveal your humanity the more people will trust you, identify with you, and respond to your reflections and appeals. More importantly, the more you seek out the humanity in others, the more they will want to connect with you – and share with you.

## **Kalamazoo Nonprofit Connection (ONEplace)**

The Kalamazoo Nonprofit Connection (ONEplace), a LinkedIn group provided by ONEplace@kpl, serves as a resource for individuals engaged in the Kalamazoo nonprofit community. It is a place to ask questions, start discussions, and connect with like-minded individuals on the topics of nonprofit leadership, management, fundraising, marketing, operations, and all other aspects of our profession. Join at <http://bit.ly/ONEplace>

Source: adapted from *Personal Learning Network for Educators: 10 Tips* by Mark Wagner